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TO WHAT END DO HIGH SCHOOLS TEACH ENGLISH?

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A PAPER

READ BEFORE THE HIGH SCHOOL SECTION OF THE
RHODE ISLAND INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION,

NOVEMBER 4, 1892.

BY

SAMUEL THURBER,
GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL, BOSTON, MASS.

BOSTON :
WILLARD SMALL,
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E.V.

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WHAT is perhaps a rather widely prevalent misconception of the object of the secondary teaching of English, was illustrated, the other day, at a meeting of high school teachers. I had had occasion to say, speaking of high school girls, that they seemed to me to have achieved fluency and correctness of expression in satisfactory measure, and could proceed to their next studies without being treated as if their composition were in arrears. This elicited from a college man who was present the sarcastic remark that it might be, "in the next century we were to be inundated by a flood of notable female writers." Thus my excellent college friend naively revealed his ideal of high school achievement in English, and perhaps threw light upon a subject on which he could speak with more authority, — the actual aim of the professorial teaching of English within the college walls.

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Here was an educator in conspicuous position, announcing literary distinction as the ambition that governs, or should govern, us teachers of English in our laborious supervision and correction of compositions. Before taking in hand this absurd ideal, and trying to show its utter irrelevancy to the conditions in which we work, I cannot forbear stopping a moment to query, — for this is a high school section, and here we are, all by ourselves, and can speak, as it were, *sub rosa*, — whether we have not our own problems to solve, and whether it is not better for us to solve them without too much help. It is a curious manner of speech that allows our schools to be spoken of as fitting schools, having a chief and determining relation to other schools that are to follow. No such presupposition exists in the German or the French educational system; no familiar nomenclature exists in the German and French languages for translating the terms that express such a presupposition. Study the literature of the *gymnasium* and the *lycée*, and you find the men of those schools conferring with each other and with the authorities of the State, theorizing, publishing, urging, agi-

tating, warning, all in their own bailiwick, as free citizens, not as dependents; considering what the nation needs or desires, what a good psychology permits or demands, what innovations in school practice the advance of science suggests as feasible, what improvements are called for in hygienic conditions: only you do not hear about college examinations as a goal of endeavor, due consideration of which is coming to be neglected. Hence I believe the fascination to us Americans of the study of pedagogy in the foreign systems and literatures. One feels himself there in a clearer atmosphere. Ambitions are there less clouded with personal strivings for distinction. One hears nothing of this or that gymnasium as getting more boys *in*, or as winning more or less *honors*. ✓

It is no more true that we prepare youth for college than it is that the college carries on the youth whom we prepare. The standard of excellence in the school is no more relative to the college than the standard of excellence in the college is relative to the school. Each must find its law in social conditions and in psychologic truth. It is our concern that we hitch our wagon to a ✓

star, just as it is the concern of the college also to hitch *its* wagon to a star. That is, we must adjust our theory and practice to our conditions, according as these conditions exist as limitations or promptings in our total environment. We have to study the laws of mind and the organization of the subjects we teach; we have to consider, each day,—is this or that the better procedure; we have to interest our pupils, and, to that end, to choose from the infinite riches of nature, art, and literature, as freely as possible, without bias from external disturbers and marplots; we have to pay homage to the science and art of teaching, in whose domain examinations *ab extra* are a foreign and unas-similable importation, injected and intruded as an anarchic element into the life that should be permitted to attend to its own business in peace and tranquillity.

✓ But to return from my digression,—what is the proper ideal for us to keep in mind in our teaching of English? Is it possible that a single high school teacher contemplates literary activity as the end and aim of his labor in this department? Is the training of notable writers, male or female,

a business with which we have any concern?

Just as much as the high school teacher of astronomy aims to give the world a flood of astronomers; or the teacher of history to call into being a multitude of historians; or the teacher of gymnastics to train a generation of athletes; or the teacher of drawing to inspire a host of artists; or the teacher of Latin to produce countless classical philologists;—so much, I suppose, is it the function of the English teacher to set up for his goal the capacity or the ambition to win the regard of the world by the production of literary work. Probably no one within the secondary pale would have expressed a conception so belated, so ill-judged, so out of all relation to the primary concepts of pedagogy. Certainly our main concern is to attend to our own business, without taking too much advice. We must not let our ideas become confused as to the object for which we are striving.

First, — what function have secondary teachers of English in common with the other secondary teachers? *Secondly*, — what function have secondary teachers of English peculiar and special to themselves?

The high school does not exist to train specialists. It deals with youth at that most interesting and momentous period of life when intellectual enthusiasms are budding and beginning to bloom; it deals with minds eminently plastic and docile and trustful; it deals with wills unsubjugated either by low considerations of prudence and self-interest or by high altruistic motives of duty to society and the state; it deals with young citizens not yet entered into the arena of business competition, not yet knowing, or capable of comprehending, the maxims of the market, not yet seasoned with that unbelief which puts by the ideals of righteousness as being unpractical in this modern age.

The secondary period of education is very different from the primary period on the one hand, and from the tertiary period on the other. It has its unmistakable characteristics — a right to live its own independent life and to seek its own laws. The high school must be autonomous if it is to flourish. The youth is neither infant nor man. He cannot be dealt with without reference to his tastes, as the child must; nor can he be allowed to circumscribe his

education within the limits of his own desires, as the man may. The great presuppositions common to all civil life are still the main staple of his study. He does not yet choose his profession, any more than does the child; yet his intellectual yearnings must be noted, respected, and deferred to, as must those of the adult man. The secondary period is a period of transition, and so is full of contradiction. Hence perhaps the difficulty of formulating a consistent secondary pedagogy, — a task which, however, we must either perform ourselves, or consent to see performed for us by men not of the guild.

All secondary teachers must begin by studying the youth himself. Then they must consider the total environment in society and the state for which the youth is to be fitted. From the limitless range of sciences and arts, languages and literatures, they must select the most fundamental, on which various superstructures of culture and conviction may be most solidly built. During the years of secondary education the youth matures; and the later years of it are very unlike the earlier ones. Hence

courses of study must be progressive, so as ever to give the newly developed powers resistance worthy of their prowess,—something to attack and conquer,—in order that the consciousness of victory and achievement may be awaked, and so may serve to invigorate all the faculties for new efforts. The pugnacity and the wilfulness of boys and the patience and complaisance of girls must have their due recognition and employment. The too easily aroused base motive of desire to beat each other must be taught to yield to the high motive of desire to beat things. The problems of science and the tasks of art lead the striving mind only upward. The shrewdness that looks to the beating of an examiner usually squints towards knavery. In this point we secondary teachers have a clear and distinct duty. Our relations involve the ever present danger of overgrowth of personal competition. Personal competition is to the struggle with objective difficulties very much what drunkenness is to inspiration.

The child in the primary school is always supervised: if he is given something to do, the teacher looks on while he does it. The

young man in college is practically never supervised: he is given something to do, and is then left to himself to do it or to devise ways of not doing it. The youth in the high school is treated perhaps too much like the primarian. The true function of the secondary teacher is to enlist the interest of the pupil so that he shall address himself to his work from an inner motive of his own. A great boy or girl studying at a little desk, in a row with other boys and girls, under the eye of a teacher, is a queer spectacle, if you will view it from the vantage-ground of reason. Our ideas of what constitutes a school are largely conventional, inherited from primitive times and conditions. A master or a mistress keeping order in a flock of youth, and hearing recitations, is about the sum and substance of the prevailing idea of a school. And so tyrannical are in our minds the connotations of the term *class*, that we ignore the individual, and try to teach groups, as if groups were teachable entities. This idea yields all too slowly to the conception of individual youth pursuing lines of study and investigation, with the teacher at hand to guide, to stimulate, to praise.

You see I can hardly tear myself away from the allurements of the general part of my theme, which is only preliminary to the special business on which I came here at your kind invitation. To this I must at once proceed.

To the teacher of English falls a triple function. He is to introduce his pupils to English literature; he is to awaken the dormant language sense, the linguistic consciousness, with reference to the mother tongue; he is to stimulate and direct the ambition for neat and comely expression. These three elements, distinct and separable both in theory and in practice, find their common principle in the obvious fact that they deal with the language and with the thought that is expressed in it, or with the art of expressing in it thought that is new and original.

With regard to English literature, the secondary education should aim to give a conspectus of the five centuries that begin with the age of Chaucer and Wycliffe.

If the teacher knows his subject, he will dispense with text-books of literary history, in which all the members of a class simultaneously learn the same lessons, and will

use the method of research, giving many topics for exploration, sending pupils to many books, and requiring reports in writing or in oral speech. There is here no possible forward marching by platoon front; the individual must find his own way, not relying on the touch of elbows, but examining with his own eyes the ground he comes to, and with his own judgment planning his next steps. The thing to eliminate from the recitation is identity of preparation. Nowhere but in the despotism of school duress, can thirty young people be brought together all prepared to say the same things. Absolutely the exercise must not be allowed to become uninteresting and monotonous. Thirty pupils do no more than one, if all do the same things; but thirty pupils do thirty times as much as one if each does a different thing from any other. The only limitation this procedure finds in practice is the lack of time for listening to what so many have to say. When each has made his own discovery, he will not be apt to acquiesce in the loss of his chance to make his report. The clock is merciless. Each should have his opportunity at once, and so it is better to keep a rein on this

exercise, lest it run away with all the English time.

The conspectus of five centuries of English literature that may be contemplated as feasible in the secondary course must be modestly planned. I would consider only four periods,—the Early period, coming down to the middle of the sixteenth century; the Elizabethan, taking in Milton, but not Dryden; the Eighteenth century, including Dryden and Butler, and ending with Cowper; and the Modern. These periods can be characterized with sufficient distinctness for high school pupils to appreciate their differences. Pupils will make acquaintance with them through the specimens which they will read in class. It will be the teacher's business to direct the choice of these specimens, and to bring out by his hints and suggestions the ways in which they relate themselves to and illustrate the period to which they belong. High school pupils can understand that *Coriolanus* could not have been produced in the same century with *Cato*, *Comus* under the same influences as *Hudibras*, *Pilgrim's Progress* in the same environment as the *Sentimental Journey*, or either of these simultaneously with *Childe Harold*.

I wish here to enter my earnest protest against the assumption that high school youth are not grown up to a perception of the broad and obvious historical relations and characteristic differences of literary periods. This assumption is made by the college requirements, which prescribe unrelated atoms of reading, under the most unnatural and crudely conceived stress and strain of anticipated compositions on themes of remembered matter. What the youth can discover and understand it is proper to say he has a natural right to be put in the way of meeting. Feeble methods in education always address the memory. An examination gropes for the residuum which a mental process has left in the memory. If the mental process has been conducted under anticipation of an examination, it has labored under an incubus, and has probably been checked midway, its spontaneity thwarted, its results spoiled. ✓

The pupil's writing, in a course of literature, should be, not in the form of examinations, but in the form of theses, or reports of explorations, drawn up with a prime purpose to make known to a listening auditory what the explorer has done. The existence of this ✓

prime purpose is all important. The youth has no business to write until he has something to communicate, and a desire to make the communication to a public of his peers. The English of this thesis or report constitutes a secondary purpose. The thesis should be well written, as a matter of course, just as it should be well pronounced in delivery, and just as the reader should be neatly dressed.

Even when it has the best imaginable opportunity, the course in literature must select a very small number of authors for reading in the class. Yet many authors can be made the objects of research, the aim being to find passages illustrative of their lives, their relations to their contemporaries, and of the form and content of their works. Here the teacher must know his ground, and start the learner on fruitful lines. It does not follow, however, that the teacher must have everything cut and dried. It is easy to overdo a direction. The question-cues must be mere starters. *E. g.*; Do you agree with Johnson and Macaulay as to the absurdity of Mrs. Thrale's second marriage? Why should Bunyan and Milton not have been intimate?

What did Thomas Gray probably think of Samuel Johnson? Compare Goldsmith's life and Gray's. Find portraits illustrating Elizabethan peaked beards and ruffs and eighteenth-century shaven faces and wigs. Show us Fanny Burney, Geo. III., Queen Charlotte, Garrick, Sir Joshua, Dr. Burney, etc., etc. Did Wordsworth show appreciation of Burns? Did Milton show appreciation of Shakespeare? Compare a specimen of Milton's prose with a specimen of Dryden's. Compare Twickenham and Strawberry Hill with the homes of Wordsworth and Tennyson. Find illustrations of Cowper's playfulness, of his domesticity, of his indignation, of his melancholy, of his piety. Take us to a coffee house of Queen Anne's time. Has our prose grown more or less regular and precise since Addison wrote? Are Elizabethan poetic forms, or eighteenth-century poetic forms, the more in vogue in the modern period? Was Shakespeare played and read in London in the eighteenth century? Show us a portrait of Mrs. Siddons, and tell some anecdotes of her. Find pictures and descriptions to illustrate Keramos. Read to the class Johnson's parallel

between Pope and Dryden, and comment on its form and content. Do the same for the classic Iona passage in the *Journey to the Western Islands*. Organize some of your classmates into a company to play scenes from Goldsmith's and Sheridan's comedies. In a similar way present the *Masque of Pandora*. Was *Comus* ever put on the public stage? What contemporary English writers did Benjamin Franklin read? What English writers did Irving, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Lowell meet in their visits to England? What famous English writers have visited this country? Correct Macaulay's estimate of Steele by reference to more impartial authorities. Imagine an interview between Goldsmith and Chatterton. Set forth the case of the disputed authorship of *The Ode to the Cuckoo*. What facts of Milton's life could we ascertain from his English poems? Present the historical associations connected with the site of Barclay & Perkins's brewery. Trace the custom of tea-drinking by the allusions to it in English literature. Compare the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as to their ways of viewing Alpine scenery. Look up fore-

shadowings of Wordsworth in Gray. Make a collection of Wordsworth's strongest lines.

These are a few specimens of the endless profusion of topics suitable for secondary exploration. For lower classes topics more easy and obvious, and for the maturest and most energetic pupils, topics much more difficult, may be devised.

In all this teaching of English literature the teacher must be the unifying principle, referring all details and particulars to their just place in the whole, and keeping the pupils' attention ever alert for indications of historic time. The teacher being present, intent on this business, there will be no need of further systematizing the work. We are too much afraid of desultoriness. It is a great note of the schoolmasterly mind to schematize, to skeletonize, to paradigmize, all the matter of instruction. Hence schoolmasters' books, the so-called text-books, are notably devoid of interest for the public at large; and when some one makes a book for schools that is consecutive and readable, as Mr. John Fiske did in his *Civil Government*, teachers look upon it askance because the skeleton in it is not immediately visible.

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Spontaneity is better than any parade of method. The instruction will have system, that is, it will stand together as a whole, provided it issue from one clear insight into the nature of the intended result. The more original the teaching, the more vain to ask the teacher for his syllabus.

Thus while we teach English literature, our aim is to make the youth acquainted with English literature, — not merely with a few atoms and fragments of it, but, so far as our opportunity and the capacity of our pupils allow, with the entirety of it as a growth and organism, which visibly changes from century to century, and in which Chaucer and Tennyson are linked together, not merely as chance additions to a great aggregate, but as fellow members of one race, living far apart in time, but close together in soul, in speech, in poetic power.

The English teacher must be fully imbued with a sense of the greatness of the great writers. Above all things, he must appreciate Shakespeare, and inculcate belief in the poet's superiority over all else in literature. Not many persons have explored the literatures of the world so thoroughly as to

know, of their own knowledge, that any one writer is absolutely unapproached; but the older one grows, and the more one reads, the more one comes to feel that this common convention, this universal agreement of the modern world to acknowledge the supremacy of Shakespeare, is just. Of course, in teaching, this convention becomes one of the leading motives. It should be taught like an article of a creed, with all reverence, to be explained, but not to be subjected to doubt. All writers, in fact, with whom it is worth while to deal in school at all, should be treated with honor. A pupil's impression of Pope, *e.g.*, should not be suffered to remain such as one gets from reading Macaulay's essay on Addison; nor should pupils be allowed to imagine a moment that Macaulay's own fame as a brilliant writer is to be snuffed out by modern epigram directed against his style or his historical accuracy.

High school pupils are always deficient in a sense for rhythm, and so fail to appreciate poetic form. Hence an important part of the course in literature has to deal with verse as such, temporarily leaving matter and content in abeyance. The five-foot iambic line

is the material of which the great mass of our verse is built. To study the nature of the five-foot iambic is to lay the foundation for appreciation of English poetry in general. Blank verse, the heroic couplet, the sonnet, are all made of five-foot iambics. Therefore, if our time is too scant to enable us to do much with poetics at large, we absolutely must pay homage to this verse form, and make our pupils chant it, scan it, dwell on it, till they become skilled in running with its movement and incapable of blundering on the accent. It is solely a matter of training. Poetry is not amorphous philosophy or narrative, and must not be read with sole reference to sentence-structure and punctuation marks. I am not afraid of a little sing-song. To read verse as if the form were an indelicate matter, that should be hidden as much as possible beneath the logical pausing, is not to imitate the rhapsodists. One does not dance for the purpose of getting there, or sing to make known one's opinion.

Coming to the second element of the English teacher's function,—instruction in the language,—it must be said that it is not possible to teach the mother tongue in

any such way as to make the study yield the peculiar mental discipline that comes from drill in the forms of a more highly inflected speech. The study of Latin or German seems to me absolutely essential as a prerequisite to the secondary study of English. French is much better than no foreign language at all, and German is far better than Latin. Of Latin, experience seems to me to show that high school pupils are sure to get too little to serve as an appreciable quantity in the sum of their culture. Of German they get a very substantial knowledge. The near kinship of English and German makes each language fruitfully illustrate the other to the youthful comprehension. For one thing, the presence in the two languages of the same set of *præterito-præsentia* verbs enables the German to throw most valuable light upon the English.

English is inflectionless now, but was not always so. The subjunctive, *e. g.*, has almost disappeared. It does not follow, however, that the subjunctive forms being lost, the verbs that once were in the subjunctive are henceforth in the indicative. We have a plenty of subjunctive locutions still. Mil-

ton and Shakespeare had far more than we have. Being often invisible to the eye, the subjunctive in modern English is a more subtle and elusive thing to find than are the hypothetical modes in Greek and Latin. It is an excellent high school exercise to detect these essentially subjunctive relations in modern and in Elizabethan speech. Let the pupil consider, *e. g.*, whether *I might be admitted* in *All's Well*, IV. v., 94, and *I might be admitted* in *Twelfth Night*, I., i., 24, are to be parsed as being in the same mode. I may be wrong, — it is many years since I ceased to entertain respect for the parsing business that once thrived in these grammar schools, — but I believe both these verbs would have been parsed as being in the “potential” mode. The ability to make such distinctions as this is quite within the competency of high school youth; and it is proper to say that whatever is clearly right, inherently interesting, and fully within the reach of youth making only wholesome effort, the youth have a natural right to the opportunity of knowing.

Some of the results of historical English grammar, then, the English teacher ought to

be able to communicate to his pupils, and ought to communicate to them, in stimulating ways, leaving them half the journey to make for themselves, and not systematically, but as occasion serves. He should eradicate the superstition of a "potential" mode. He should teach how to distinguish between racy idiom and ancient blunder. He should know how to strike the right tone of relish and insight in dealing with the uncouth forms of Wycliffe's version, of the Paston Letters, of Sir Thomas Malory, with the archaisms of Spenser, and with the vulgarisms of Bunyan. He should not forget what of good temper and forbearance is due even to the innovators who pronounce *had rather* and *had as lief* ignoble forms that should give way to the more parsable *would rather* and *would as soon*.

One of the countless pleasant memories that I connect with the days of my schoolboyhood is of analyzing sentences according to the formulas of the late S. S. Greene. Now, I cannot quite get over the feeling that that analysis was a good thing for us boys. Doubtless it was carried into absurd schoolmasterly refinements,—for its author was

notably a schoolmaster first, and a student only at many removes from that, — and was mechanical in its plan, and too little stimulating to curiosity. Yet it was a good thing, or the germ of one. Something we teachers of English should surely do to nurse the *sentence sense*, the great safe-guard of the writer of English. The thought can be uttered only in the sentence: the thought *is* the sentence. The categories of the sentence-structure are the categories of the thought-process. The child constructs sentences unconsciously; the youth analyzes sentences into their elements; the adult studies the science of thought. The high school graduate should be incapable of writing, with the outward forms of sentences, groups of words that are not sentences. The sentence-feeling in trained perfection might almost be adopted as the goal of endeavor in secondary English teaching. Then the habit of viewing the sentence analytically naturally begets the complementary habit of viewing it synthetically; and the ability to apprehend sentences of unusual length as wholes facilitates the reading of such writers as Milton, Clarendon, Hooker and Ruskin,

and renders all reading of archaic matter more fruitful and pleasing. In practice I would confine the study of sentence analysis to the nomenclature that is universally recognized. Such whimsical technicalities as Mr. Greene propounded had better be avoided.

With regard to *composition*, the third of the main functions assigned by present usage to the English teacher, there would be much to say did time permit. This subject has of late been made prominent by the complaints of the colleges. Even colleges that strenuously refuse to admit on certificate, but insist on examining candidates, find themselves surcharged with poor writers, to teach whom the very elements, the primary rudiments, of decent writing, they must employ a force of instructors, and so descend from the true college function to do the work legitimately belonging to the school. The great query with regard to these belated youth is, — how did they ever pass the examination in English and get into college. I am sure of this, — that youth will write carefully and neatly, as soon as they are convinced that they must; and that they will absolutely

make no effort in this direction beyond the point that they know will suffice. A young man fitting for college is a busy person, and economizes his effort and his time by keen instinct. The coming examination he discounts exactly. Girls you can work up to beautiful zeal for nice work. Boys tie no ribbons on their themes, they weep not over censure, they sit not up nights to copy and recopy in their anxiety to please you. The examination is their goal, and whatsoever is more than that cometh of evil. In the very nature of things an examination works two ways: it draws pupils up to its level, and at the same time prevents them from rising higher. Why do you set an examination, if you mean to speak contemptuously of it as a standard, and exhort learners to go beyond its requirements? An examination is a thing to be passed, not at all to be surpassed. Those who have passed the college examination should of course have the college guarantee, and be by the college protected against the flings of a carping world.

The only thing to do in the matter of compositions is to be exacting. If a pupil can do excellent work in his other studies,

but remains a sloven in his English writing, — the case is hardly supposable, — refuse him promotion. Other studies may be merged and mingled together in an average; but English should be a category by itself: without good English not even the most brilliant scholarship should suffice. English composition concerns the *form* in which work is done in all departments; and it is perfectly just to insist as much upon propriety of form as upon propriety of substance and content. If a pupil writes upon a Sunday-school picnic, will you suffer a profound respect in his mind for the matter of his communication to dwarf all consideration for its appearance? Pupils usually know a good deal more about how to write than they are willing to reduce to practice. They must have some spur to rouse them to an effort. In preparatory schools the college examination tends to thwart the application of any such spur. In other schools the stimulus can be devised easily enough if all the teachers can agree as to its importance.

I was amused to see in a newspaper the suggestion that pupils should be required to write something very frequently. The fact

is, in almost any modern school pupils are writing about half the time. The daily emptyings of the waste-baskets reveal lecture-notes, reading-notes, first drafts, solutions, memorandums, notes of request for sundry permissions and exemptions,—in fact, a deal of skimble-skamble stuff of indescribable variety,—almost all of it composition. This, of course, cannot come under the teacher's eye. It is vast in quantity, utterly formless in execution. So constant is it as an element of school life, that the merely occasional composition stands no chance beside it of exerting a determining influence on the aggregate of habit which the pupil is forming.

Evidently the thing to do in this case is to diminish the amount of this illegitimate scribbling. A girl told me that she wrote one hundred and fifty pages of notes of matter dictated by a teacher in the way of lecture, and that her penmanship had been pretty much wrecked in the process. She had to write under stress and strain. She acquired a certain habitual reckless gait and pace, which now she cannot put aside. She was too young for such an exercise. This

taking of notes, I venture to say, is needless in secondary education. Then if a pupil is to read something and report on it, encourage him to trust his memory and deliver himself orally, without notes. Girls will copy out pages of books to read to the class. When the matter is historical or biographical, the copying is not only superfluous, it is pernicious. The high school girl is like Hamlet: when she is moved, her impulse is, "My tables, meet it is I set it down."

The scribbling cannot, of course, be wholly done away with, but it can be diminished in amount. Then all the teachers should equally be teachers of composition. Certainly, pupils compose for every teacher. If the teachers are cultivated persons, they surely know enough about good English. Every exercise should be viewed for its English as well as for its exhibition of knowledge or skill. That one teacher should be burdened with more than his quota of compositions is wrong. This is no special art, requiring peculiar knowledge. Is there any high school teacher who is not a lady or a gentleman? Is there any such teacher who would acknowledge himself less

competent than the rest to observe and to reprove faults in morals, faults in manners, faults in spoken speech ?

The written matter that a pupil produces in each department should, so far as is possible, come for censure before the teacher in that department ; for censure both as to form and as to content ; the content to have no recognition or reward unless the form is satisfactory. A teacher should be like a royal personage, who receives no callers that do not strictly observe the etiquette of dress prescribed by custom ; and not a common, familiar companion, for whom anything is good enough.

Then the compositions on topics of a general character, such as do not come within the province of a special teacher, — and there should, of course, be a good many such compositions, — might properly be divided equally among all the teachers. Or the pupils might be apportioned to the teachers at the beginning of the year. Suppose there should be thirty-five to a teacher. Each teacher would then have his class of thirty-five in composition, and would soon find out how many exercises he could have

them write and he get time to supervise with due care and deliberation. If each pupil writes once a week, the teacher will have seven themes a day to read, — an hour's work; though, as weekly themes would be short ones, it might well be that he would learn to read them at a little quicker rate.

Now let me say, — and my experience in this matter is considerable, — that seven themes a day is quite as much as any teacher ought to undertake. I have settled down to the basis of an hour for five, and even this average I find is made possible only by the fact that most of the themes require but little attention. Seven per day, when the exercises are short, is enough. Probably some teachers would push them all forward to Saturday and then make a grand crush of them, with groanings and imprecations. But that would be wrong every way. It is essential to give a written theme back to its writer almost instantly. It is a fatal laches to let days intervene between the theme and the criticism. Seven themes a day will hurt no one, but rather prove pleasing and useful to many a teacher whose sense of form in language is jaded and needs reviving.

I am utterly unwilling to say a word in favor of the plan now most in vogue, of imposing the composition work of scores of pupils upon a single teacher already keeping full class hours like the rest, and, like the rest, having his daily preparations to make. To style one an English teacher is not to confer on one any special ability to resist the hebetating influences of excessive work over themes. The English teacher must protect himself, and naturally will protect himself. If he professes to be reading a great many themes daily, it will be well to inquire how he reads them, and how impressive he makes his comment to the young writers. If the results of English composition teaching are unsatisfactory, something else must be done than trying to squeeze more theme-reading out of the English teacher. He reads too many already. My agreement with President Eliot in his general reformatory tendencies comes so near being unqualified, that I regret the necessity of dissenting from his plan for easing the English teacher. President Eliot's plan might be called a phase of the ancient Lancasterian method. The trouble with it would be that the monitors

would surely sink into a low caste and become helots. The English teacher himself, no matter how scholarly and fine-mannered, would at once become a pariah, were his function to be confined to theme reading and marking. Nothing will do but that the themes be read by men and women for whom the youth have the fullest respect and regard.

I do not see how the teaching of English writing is to be much improved except by improving the tone of the schools; and the tone of the schools is to be raised only by enlisting in the work all the teachers. The fitting for examinations is an influence constantly tending to debase tone. Where a corps of teachers is unanimous and resolute, all things are possible.

The main lines in which reform of composition teaching must move are then, 1st, Repression of irresponsible, destructive scribbling; and 2d, Enlargement and increase of responsible, educative writing. Writing, to have value as a factor in education, must be the expression of a positive mental content that is worth communicating and naturally seeks utterance. It must have its oppor-

tunity: it must not be driven and forced up to high speed. Just what to do to prepare for a college examination in English, I do not know: the thing lies outside the domain of pedagogic science.

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To what end do high schools teach English



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